CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND CRIME

By L. H. LEHMANN

THE AVERAGE AGE of criminals in America in 1890 is said to have been 48 years; in 1933, 26 years and in 1938-40, about 19 years. War conditions after 1940 brought an alarming increase in juvenile delinquency that lowered the average crime age to sixteen. As a consequence, there has been a growing demand for the teaching of religion in the public schools as a possible deterrent to crime increase among American youth. The demand is loudest from spokesmen of the Roman Catholic church, which not only aims to have religion made a part of the public school curriculum but claims the right of being the sole educator of all youth.

Catholic spokesmen, from the pope down, are vociferous in condemning American public school education as "Godless" because of the very wise and necessary provision of our Constitution to keep secular education and church teaching rigidly apart. This, however, does not mean a denial of the benefits of good religious and ethical training as a part of the education of the youth of this country. Religion, in fact, has always been an essential part of the general education of youth in America, but denominational teaching has been kept out of the classroom. Our Constitutional amendment concerning separation of church and state not only does not prohibit the profession and teaching of true religion, but it guarantees and safeguards liberty of conscience and of worship to all religions not subversive of the American way of life. What it does prohibit is the "establishment" by law and tax support of any religion. The teaching of the religion of any church in the classrooms of the public schools would soon lead to that.

Many states are relaxing or changing their constitutional provisions to allow school boards to cooperate with religious organizations by devoting "released" time from school to religious instruction. To many this seems to be the entering wedge for the actual introduction of specific church teaching into the classroom. From that it would be but one step further to other privileges fostering this or that religious organization at public expense and upholding religious teaching by public law.

This is happening because many have been convinced that the alarming increase in crime among young people today can best be overcome by uniting the teaching of religion with mathematics and other school subjects heretofore taught in a "Godless" way, as the Catholics call it. But before admitting that the mixing of religious and non-religious teaching would lessen the prevalence of crime, two things should be carefully considered:

(1) Has the teaching of religion in private schools lessened crime among their pupils compared with pupils from public schools?

(2) Is all religious teaching productive of correct ethical conduct?

CATHOLIC CRIME STATISTICS

If New York City be taken as a sample of war-time juvenile delinquency, the Roman Catholic church must take the largest share of responsibility. Father George B. Ford, Roman Catholic chaplain at Columbia University and authority on social matters, is on record as admitting that *more than three-fifths of the juvenile delinquents arrested in New York City in the early part of 1943 were Roman Catholics.* As quoted in the newspaper *PM* of February 29, 1944, he declared:

> **"During the first four months of 1943, 64 per cent of the juvenile delinquents in Children's Court were Catholic. This means the Catholic church has something to be greatly concerned about."**

How grave an indictment of the Roman Catholic church this is may be judged from the fact that *only about one-fifth of the total population of New York City is Roman Catholic.*

The same amazing percentage of Roman Catholics is to be found among the most hardened adult criminals in jails and penitentiaries. A sample of this may be seen at Clinton Prison, Dannemora, N. Y., which is called the "Siberia of America," both because of its frigid climate and the high percentage of long-termers and lifers. In a feature article in the N. Y. *Daily Mirror* of March 12, 1941, lauding efforts of the Roman Catholic church to reform the many Catholics there, it is revealed that *of the total prison population of 1,989 at Dannemora, twelve hundred are Roman Catholics.* Reporting the results of a religious survey of all the jails of Connecticut the Catholic *Commonweal* magazine for October 9, 1942, says: "Catholics far outnumber Protestants in Connecticut jails, possibly *by four to one.*"

Despite facts such as these, Catholic spokesmen in America continue to condemn the public schools of the United States as the breeding centers of American crime. They point to America's "great horde of practicing pagans in the medical and legal professions," to educators in American schools "misinforming and misdirecting students," and predict in dire terms the complete undermining of Western civilization unless religion (the Roman Catholic religion) is taught in our public schools and secular colleges and universities. Their diatribes against our American democratic way of life are too closely reminiscent of the Fascist outpourings of Mussolini and Hitler in the heyday of their power.

In the N. Y. *Times* of May 17, 1943, Jesuit Father Francis P. Le Buffe declared:

> **"Thanks to our godless American public school, which is un-American, we have a generation today which does not know God."**

The amazing part of it all is the supineness of groups of otherwise intelligent, alert business and professional men who listen to such utterances, accepting them without question, overwhelmed, it seems, by the oracular and pontifical manner in which they are delivered.

An outstanding example of this was an address of the Jesuit president of Fordham University, the Rev. Robert I. Gannon, before a no less august body than the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York at their 172nd Annual Banquet in 1940, and repeated by him many times since at important public gatherings. The speaker's main object of attack was our public school education—because it does not permit the teaching of religion, that is, of

course, the Roman Catholic religion[1]. To this lack he ascribed the high percentage of criminals inside and outside of our jails. Sneering at Ezra Cook's truly American and practical adage: "Better build schoolrooms for the boys than cells and gibbets for the man", he added "*but now every time we put in an order for a classroom, we have to include an order for two sanitary cells and a chromium gibbet*"!

He quoted glibly from a report by the Citizens' Committee on the Control of Crime in New York to prove how crime is on the rapid increase with no signs of abatement, and that "one New Yorker in every 53 was arrested in the course of the past year—not for traffic violations or for leaving ash cans uncovered, but for serious violations of the law". He further proved to his amazed audience that the rest of the country is even worse in this regard than New York. Since the honorable body of outstanding citizens who comprise the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York made no protest nor questioned the speaker's conclusion, they must all have gone home convinced that we are a wayward, if not lost nation solely because the teaching of the Catholic religion is divorced from our public school system of education.

Had any member of Father Gannon's audience been quick and brave enough to tackle the underlying significance of his statistics on crime, the Jesuit's pre-arranged conclusion could have been proved utterly false and misleading. For he carefully avoided any approach to the well-known and provable fact *that an abnormally high proportion of our prison populations is the product of the Roman Catholic church and its educational system* where religion, the Roman Catholic religion, is the most important subject in the curriculum. In order to confirm and explain this fact, the writer of this article personally interviewed Mr. H. C. Kane, the chief observer in the criminal courts for that same Committee on the Control of Crime from whose report Father Gannon quoted his findings. Mr. Kane's frank opinion was, that the teaching of religion in the public schools would seem to provide no deterrent to crime, since Roman Catholics numerically top all crime lists and the Catholic church exceeds all others in teaching religion in schools.

The statistics below fully bear out this conclusion. They are not taken from anti-Catholic sources, not even from the cold, impartial figures supplied by Government bureaus. In order to be scrupulously fair, I have taken them from official Catholic sources, from the published results of a lengthy and careful survey made by the Fr. Leo Kalmer, O.F.M., Chaplain at Illinois State Penitentiary, Joliet, Ill., from 1917 to 1936, the year of publication[2]. His facts and figures were supplied to him by thirty-six Roman Catholic prison chaplains throughout the country. There can therefore be no possibility that the figures have been unfairly made up by us to overstress the greater prevalence of crime among Catholics.

On page 54, Table II, are shown the following percentages of Catholics in

[1] The full text of Father Gannon's speech may be seen in the Catholic Brooklyn *Tablet*, Dec. 14, 1940. It will repay reading in full.

[2] *cf. Crime and Religion*, by Leo Kalmer, O.F.M. Preface by the Very Rev. Francis J. Haas, Ph.D., Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, Ill. 1936.

the prisons named:

	Catholics
Florence, Ariz.	53.33%
State Pen., San Quentin, Cal.	46.92%
State Pen., Wethersfield, Conn.	63.64%
Ill. State Pen., Joilet	48.50%
So. Ill. State Pen., Chester	7.88%
Indiana State Prison, Mich. City	7.69%
State Prison, Ft. Madison, Ia.	8.51%
La. State Pen., Baton Rouge	16.22%
Md. Pen., Baltimore	21.91%
State Prison, Charleston, Mass.	53.29%
State Prison, Jackson, Mich.	10.00%
Miss. State Pen., Parchman	0.94%
State Pen., Jefferson City, Mo.	22.03%
State Pen., Lincoln, Nebr.	27.69%
State Prison, Trenton, N. J.	47.61%
State Pen., Santa Fe, N. Mex.	66.67%
Auburn Prison, Auburn, N. Y.	57.31%
Sing Sing Prison, Ossining, N. Y.	54.77%
Ohio Pen., Columbus	25.01%
State Prison, McAlister, Okla.	1.76%
Oregon State Pen., Salem	15.63%
Eastern State Pen., Phila., Pa.	36.15%
The Pen., Columbus, S. C.	1.00%
Tenn. State Prison, Nashville	2.71%
Brushby Mt. Prison, Petros, Tenn.	0.63%
State Pen., Huntsville, Texas	12.20%
State Prison, Salt Lake City, U.	32.79%
West Va. Pen., Moundsville	9.96%
Wisc. State Prison, Waupon	43.52%
State Pen., Rawlins, Wyo.	28.85%
U. S. Pen., Atlanta, Ga.	21.20%
U. S. Pen., Leavenworth, Kans.	23.44%

In judging these percentages it must be remembered that Catholics, according to their church's own estimates, form only about 16% of the total population of the United States. On Page 76 of Father Kalmer's book, Table III shows that in a selection of 28 States, the average Catholic population is slightly higher, but still only 17.24%, whereas the average Catholic prison population in those same 28 States is 33.62%.

But if we select a few typical States, we find the following:

New York: 26.73% of total population is Catholic
" " 56.46% of prison population is Catholic

Arizona: 33.16% of total population is Catholic
" 53.26% of prison population is Catholic

California: 16.83% of total population is Catholic
" 43.61% of prison population is Catholic

Wisconsin: 23.79% of total population is Catholic
" 43.52% of prison population is Catholic

Wyoming: 7.13% of total population is Catholic
" 32.18% of prison population is Catholic

Not all of the Catholic criminals listed above by the Catholic prison chaplains attended parochial schools. The percentages are as follows: attended Catholic schools only: 20.82%; attended both Catholic and public schools: 26.89%; attended public schools only: 35.85%; attended no school: 16.64%.

It should be noted that these Catholic prison chaplains put forward the argument, as in their favor, that the majority of Catholics committed to prison are either of foreign birth or parentage, mostly Italian, Spanish, Polish, Austrian and Irish. This, however, does not serve to exculpate the Catholic church, since these are Catholic countries *par excellence*, where "Roman Catholic culture" is most effective. On the contrary, it only serves to show that our much-maligned traditional American secular education and non-Catholic culture cannot be blamed for the crime increase in this country. The balance, therefore, in every instance—both as to religion and type of schooling—is in favor of non-Catholic upbringing and our secular public school education.

If we turn to official government statistics of the number of criminals committed to prisons each year, we find that a consistently abnormal 50 per cent or more of them are Roman Catholics. This can be seen from the most recent *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Correction in the State of New*

York to the State Legislature. In the latest available report for the year ending June 30, 1942, we find the following figures of prisoners committed to the two largest New York prisons—Clinton (Dannemora) and Sing Sing:*

	Total	Roman Caths.	Greek Caths.	Protestants	Jews	Misc.
Clinton	159	80	....	74	3	2
Sing Sing	1,303	627	10	514	130	22

For the year ending June 30, 1941, we find the following (page 19):

	Total	Roman Caths.	Protestants	Pagans	Jews	Misc.
Clinton	149	80	65	....	4	....
Sing Sing	1,477	725	581	5	152	14

For the year 1940, when Father Gannon delivered his diatribe before the N. Y. State Chamber of Commerce against the "Godlessness" of American secular education, the following figures on the religious affiliation of criminals committed to the above two prisons were submitted to the New York Legislature by the Commissioner of Correction (page 18):

	Total	Roman Caths.	Protestants	Jews	Misc.
Clinton	168	89	76	1	2
Sing Sing	1,559	788	574	175	22

There were no "pagans" committed that year to these two prisons.

The same average of 50 per cent Roman Catholic criminals committed to these two jails is listed consistently year after year in these reports. The significance of this high percentage can be judged by the fact that *Roman Catholics make up only about 25 per cent of the total population of New York State.*

THE NATURE OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS TEACHING

This second aspect of education and crime requires probing into a matter that tolerant Americans want to avoid. Everybody is afraid to connect crime with any religious teaching. Yet if it could be proved that crime were more prevalent, say, among Mormons, Methodists or Mennonites in proportion to crime among other religious sects, Catholic authorities would not hesitate to ask whether this is not due to the moral teachings of those sects. One should not hesitate, therefore, to pose this same question with regard to Roman Catholicism, since it is an admitted fact that crime among Roman Catholics is more than twice what it should be (all other things being equal) in proportion to the relative number of Catholics in the United States.

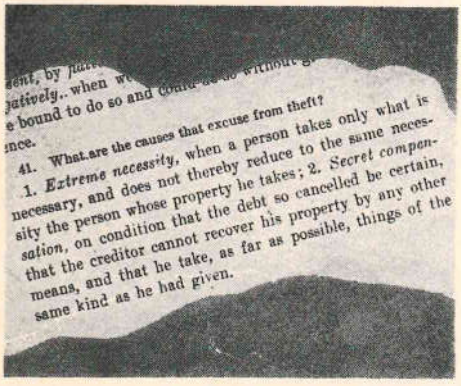
Space here permits consideration of only one principle of Roman Catholic moral theology which could easily have a direct bearing on the question, namely, *the condoning of theft and robbery under certain circumstances.* This is known among Catholic theologians as "occult compensation". It is also contained in catechisms and textbooks of Catholic doctrine used in Catholic schools in the United States. It is to be found, for instance, in *The Manual of Christian Doctrine,* which went into its 49th edition in 1928, and which bears the *nihil obstat* of M. S. Fisher, S.T.L., *censor librorum,* and of Arthur J. Scanlon, S.T.D., *censor deputatus,* along with the *imprimatur* of Cardinal-Archbishop Dougherty of Philadelphia, and is published by John J. McVey, Philadelphia, Pa. In the preface we are told that, "This book is intended as a manual of religious instruction

* *cf. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Correction for the Year 1942* (published in 1943), page 18.

not only in the novitiate and scholasticate of teaching congregations, but also in the classes of high school, academies and colleges.'' On page 295, this textbook describes and discusses theft, its nature and various forms, such as larceny, robbery, cheating, fraud, extortion, etc. On page 297, we have the following regarding the condoning of theft:

"Q. What are the causes that excuse from theft?"

"A. 1. Extreme necessity, when a person takes only what is necessary, and does not thereby reduce to the same necessity the person whose property he takes. 2. Secret compensation, on condition that the debt so cancelled be certain, that the creditor cannot recover his property by any other means, and that he take, as far as possible, things of the same kind as he had given."


41. What are the causes that excuse from theft?
1. *Extreme necessity*, when a person takes only what is necessary, and does not thereby reduce to the same necessity the person whose property he takes; 2. *Secret compensation*, on condition that the debt so cancelled be certain, that the creditor cannot recover his property by any other means, and that he take, as far as possible, things of the same kind as he had given.

Facsimile photograph from page 297 of *The Manual of Christian Doctrine.*

Now, moral conduct can be no better than the moral principles upon which it is based. Most crimes are directly connected with thievery and robbery.*

If a Roman Catholic youth, for instance, can persuade himself that he has ''extreme necessity'' for an automobile, he will consider himself justified in stealing it legitimately according to the above teaching, provided he knows that the owner will not be thereby impoverished. The doctrine of ''secret compensation'' applies mostly to employees who consider they are being underpaid for their labor. A twenty-dollar-a-week cashier in a side-street cafeteria may consider herself underpaid and apply this principle to justify her pilfering of odd dimes and quarters from the cash register whenever she can safely do so. Many a cashier in a large bank or commercial business corporation has done just this until he found himself in jail for large-scale embezzlement. A desperate man could also easily argue himself into thinking that he is justly entitled to some of the surplus money of a rich victim and will go after it with a gun. Likewise grafting politicians seize upon the argument implicit in this teaching to justify their conviction that they are worth much more to the community than their elected offices pay them. Such a one was ''sewer-pipe Connolly'' of the Borough of Queens, N. Y., whose self-appropriations left large areas of New York City without an adequate sewer system.

This doctrine of ''secret compensation'' was, of course, unheard of in Christianity, even in the Catholic church, prior to the Jesuit casuists of the seventeenth century. It was invented by them along with other unethical doctrines such as ''mental reservation'', ''the end justifies the means'', ''the end sanctifies the means'' etc., to make Catholicism popular with the masses. It also helped to thinly rationalize their own exploits. Thus Catholic textbooks of moral theology today make no pretension of showing

* The N. Y. State Commissioner of Correction in his report for 1942 on juvenile delinquency (p. 112) states: *"Stealing is the reason for court appearances of the largest group among boys, 4,307 or 53.7 per cent having been referred for stealing in some form."*

that these principles of conduct take their origin from the Ten Commandments or from Christian revelation. They merely propound them as accepted Catholic doctrine and trace them back to Gury, the Jesuit fountainhead.

When Protestants uncover and attack this doctrine of "secret compensation", the Jesuits have a stock argument ready to meet it. Their alibi sounds like this: "The Catholic doctrine of secret compensation is limited to cases of dire emergency; its application is strictly qualified and limited. No Catholic takes it in the sense of a free-for-all license to steal."

The sophistry in this confusing of strict theory and loose practice is common to many other Catholic doctrines. It is found in the teaching about the worshipping of saints and their images. In theory the veneration of statues and medals can be rationalized and stripped of all appearance of superstition and idolatry. But in practice among the common people this means nothing. The millions of ignorant Catholics, from the semi-feudal peasantry of Europe to the Mexican peons and the superstitious-minded Latin Americans, attribute magical qualities to these images and feel that the Catholic church wholly approves of it. So with the doctrine of "secret compensation". Finespun distinctions of theologians mean nothing to the masses, above all to children, even if you grant that nuns and other Catholic teachers know and take the pains to emphasize these scholastic subtleties.

The blunt fact, confirmed by countless cases, is that many Catholics just get the one idea from this teaching, namely, that stealing is not essentially evil at all times, but, on the contrary, fair and reasonable if one needs something badly enough and the owner does not. How this conviction can be stretched to cover untold cases is easy to imagine. It is limited only by the envy and self-prejudice of the individual conscience—which vary immeasurably from person to person.

All in all, it is most unfortunate that any religion is permitted to teach such a principle as part of the curriculum of American school education, much more if it should ever be taught in the public schools on the pretext of helping to lessen crime among the youth of America.

The fact of the matter is, that religion does not belong primarily in the school at all. It belongs in the home and church, and can only enter the school if the children bring it with them. The aim of the school is to *educate*, not to *sanctify* our children. It is the children who should sanctify the school, which they can do only if they come from homes and churches where true religious development is fostered.

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